

# Spirituality in health care



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For many of us, compassion fatigue is unheard. Is it a disease or side effect of health care environment? The following paper will cover what is compassion fatigue? What are the warning signs of compassion fatigue? And, how to seek and receive interventions to overcome compassion fatigue? The nature of compassion fatigue and its problems Compassion fatigue is mixture of physical, emotional and spiritual distress. According to, The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing the best and simple way to define compassion fatigue as a state of psychic exhaustion. (Barbara Lombardo, RN, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Caryl Eyre, RN, MSN, 2011)

The reason compassion fatigue affect health care workers are because of their close interaction with sick patients. Nurses' emotional and mental state gets challenged, when nurses or health care workers get close interaction with patients suffering and pain. The close interaction also could resemble some of the family members of health care workers, which cause distress in health care workers life. Barbara Lombardo, RN, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Caryl Eyre, RN, MSN, 2011) The Online Journal of Issues in nursing online, explain the reason nurses predominantly get exposed to compassion fatigue.

(Barbara Lombardo, RN, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Caryl Eyre, RN, MSN, 2011)

Because, of nurses nature of providing care cause them get close to patients emotionally and mentally. Nurses become partners with patients, not as observers.

The above explained involvement with patients can cause compassion fatigue in nurses (or health care workers). Barbara Lombardo, RN, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Caryl Eyre, RN, MSN, 2011) After reviewing many research articles on compassion fatigue, the main cause of compassion fatigue is

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empathy. Stress and anxiety naturally arise when caring for sick ones and it is the nature of health care jobs. According to, article Compassion Fatigue: Are You At Risk all caregivers are at risk for emotional exhaustion from their work. (Nancy Jo Bush, 2009) Empathy is part of nursing nature and expression of empathy is part of caregivers' responsibility.

But, when one is expressing empathy, it may counter act on the individual emotions, by traumatizing their cognitive, spiritual and behavioral emotions. Nursing burnout can directly cause Compassion fatigue. Workplace role uncertainty, over workload, working situation such as working nights, or problems with other employees and role conflict among nurses and other coworkers can cause burnout in nursing health care. (Karen E. Espeland, 2009) After, being expose to nursing burnout for long time, nurses will start falling into compassion fatigue paths.

Nurses and health care employees can keep up their life without compassion fatigue and nursing burnout by practicing stress free physical, emotional and spiritual needs. According to, Net of Care Information for caregiver, state that Meeting Physical, emotional and spiritual needs will help caregivers to overcome compassion fatigue. These needs include, exercise, diet, fighting fatigue and finding time to relax. Exercise is one of the best ways to prevent mental and physical distress.

Though, benefits of practicing exercise are many, but to cut effects of compassion fatigue, lowering blood pressure, reducing depression and anxiety are the main important ones. Nurses and health care workers are not properly consuming, three meals a day. At times workloads can cause nurses

to forget to eat. During busy workload, junk food is very easy to consume. Consumption of healthy meals are necessary because, consumption of healthy meals assure better health.

Eating three, well-balanced meal per day, drinking six to eight glasses of water, and controlling caffeine based drinks such as coffee and tea are very important to support healthy diet. Practicing Relaxation (meditation) techniques on a daily basis will help nurses to keep up stress free mind. Finding a hobby, practicing yoga, getting a massage will help nurses to relax and cut physical and emotional stress. (Net of Care information for caregivers, 2013) The best way to control compassion fatigue is by maintaining stress free life by physical, emotional and spiritual activities.

Warning signs of compassion fatigue According to, the article Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Watch for the Signs, There are many warning signs of compassion fatigue. These warning signs are divided into five groups. They are cognitive, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, and somatic states of a person. Symptoms of compassion fatigue in cognitive group include, lowered concentration, apathy, rigidity, disorientation and preoccupation with trauma. Symptoms of compassion fatigue in emotional group include anxiety, guilt, anger, helplessness, depression and powerlessness.

Health care workers may find irritable, withdrawn, moody, and hyper-vigilance in behavioral group. Symptoms in spiritual group may include, questioning life's meaning, pervasive hopelessness, loss of purpose and faith, and questioning religious beliefs. Symptoms of compassion fatigue in somatic state include, sweating, tachypnea, breathing difficulty, dizziness,

headaches and difficulty falling or staying asleep. Since, the warning signs are many; it is important to identifying compassion fatigue and obtains appropriate therapy interventions. Dennis Portnoy, 2011) Strategies and interventions to prevent compassion fatigue Compassion fatigue is a slow process; often work environmental stress start builds up and finally ends up in compassion fatigue illness.

Recognition of Compassion fatigues is available now days, As well, many interventions and strategies available for those who need it. Some of them include: receiving help from On-site counseling, joining support groups for staff, debriefing session, getting a massage, bereavement intervention and attention to spiritual needs. Barbara Lombardo, RN, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, Caryl Eyre, RN, MSN, 2011) Nurses and healthcare workers are the main focus of strategies and interventions of compassion fatigue, to ease out compassion fatigue and its side effects. Having someone to talk too, practicing an activity which relaxes nurses and caregivers minds and body, should be the first step in fighting compassion fatigue. It is important for employers, to offer strategies and interventions to overcome compassion fatigue in employees.

In addition, to identifying and providing strategies for compassion fatigue, it is also important to identifying compassion fatigue in employees. Effects of compassion fatigues are costly. Because, errors such as, unintentional ignorance, medical errors, and avoiding the patient, can result relating the employer in financial responsibility. In conclusion, compassion fatigue will affect caregivers (nurses) at one point. Identifying the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue is very crucial. Along, with identifying signs and symptoms seeking for profession help is also important.

If compassion fatigue is untreated, it can lead health care workers to depression and substance abuses. Writer of Compassion Fatigue: Are You At Risk, point out a Native American teaching which states, each time nurses or (caregivers) help patients to get healed, we (nurses or caregivers) give a piece of our self until, at some point we need healing. (Nancy Jo Bush, 2009) Maintaining a balanced empathy can help health care workers to avoid compassion fatigue. Also, a well-balanced empathy can help each people to control and stay a stable physical, emotional and spiritual state of minds.